

Fishing Tournament Advisory Committee/WDNR Tournaments Working Group August 17, 2005

MEETING NOTES

- I. Welcome and Introductions
 - A. Welcome and introduction of attendees.

FTAC

**Mike Hofmann – WI BASS Federation
Michelle Kilburn – Mercury Marine
Steven Lindahl – Ranger Boats
Mark Soletske – NEW Tournament Trail
Jim Schommer – Walleyes for Tomorrow
John Aschenbrenner – Conservation Congress
Bob Miller – WI Wildlife Federation
Steve Winters – WI Smallmouth Bass Alliance
Brett Stapelmann – WI Bowfishing Assoc.
Joel Everts – Packerland CVB
Roger Dreher – Wisconsin Assoc. of Lakes
Ted Lind – WI Council of Sport Fishing Orgs.
Warren Zaren – CAST
Cornell Stroik – WI BASS Federation
Chuck Rolfsmeyer – The BASS Federation**

WDNR

**Tim Kroeff – Sturgeon Bay
Bob Hujik – Eau Claire
Ron Benjamin – LaCrosse
Russell Wilson – LaCrosse
Barry Meister – Stevens Point
Kendall Kamke – Oshkosh
Patrick Schmalz - Madison**

- B. Agenda Repair.

Agenda item II.A. was removed since draft minutes were not yet complete.

- II. WDNR Update (1.5 hours) – Patrick Schmalz, WDNR
 - A. Meeting notes from June 29 meeting.
 - 1. Suggested edits.
 - 2. Finalization of notes.
 - B. Pilot Program Evaluation.
 - 1. FLW Everstart tournament, August 3-6, Mississippi River, LaCrosse
 - a. UWSP mortality study data collection.

Details of data collection were explained by Patrick Schmalz. Before finishing explanation, several questions were interjected.

- ***How were the control/reference fish collected and could that have been a source of mortality?***
Schmalz explained that reference bass were collected via electrofishing and transported to the holding location via the electrofishing boat. It was further explained that the net pens were late to arrive in LaCrosse and thus the first day's reference fish had to be held in a hoop net overnight until the reference pen was installed. Schmalz also explained that the reference fish were to provide estimates of mortality associated with their capture and holding for the purpose of reducing it from the mortality estimated in pens holding tournament fish. In

addition, in every study of tournament mortality reviewed that utilized reference fish, those fish were collected via electrofishing.

- *Was water temperature and dissolved oxygen monitored?* Ron Benjamin explained that ‘Sonds’ were installed at the net pen site that recorded water temperature and DO every 15 minutes for the entire study period.
- *How long were the fish held and were all fish held in the same fashion?* All fish were held for 5 days post capture. All fish (reference and tournament) were subject to similar holding, the only difference being different densities in some pens, due to lower catch.

There was a great deal of discussion bordering on argument relating to study design and potential flaws. At this point, it was noted that 18 LMB and 3 SMB were tested for largemouth bass virus (LMBV) and all the LMB tested positive and none of the SMB tested positive. The high mortality rates of LMB observed were most likely due to LMBV reducing the immune system of infected LMB.

The LMBV discussion led to question whether tournaments should be allowed or not during certain times or under certain circumstances. The question was not discussed further.

- *Were there dead fish found on the river itself?* Warden Russell Wilson observed and documented 39 dead bass in an area near one of the release sites. In addition, he observed a small number of dead pan fish and a dead catfish. Marinas also reported to him that they had observed dead bass onshore and disposed of them.

There was continued discussion regarding the unusually high water temperatures and their impact on tournament-associated mortality.

- *How many bass were culled?* Anglers were interviewed after weigh-in regarding the number of fish they culled. There was some potential confusion among anglers regarding what was considered culling, but the data collected indicate that over 400 bass were culled.

Some disappointment was expressed that no members of the FTAC have gone either of the first two pilot program tournaments, and that it was their obligation to do so.

Kendall Kamke of WDNR described a recent pilot study to assess post-release walleye mortality on Lake Winnebago this summer. He noted that all methods used to hold fish were unsuccessful. The method that held some promise appeared to be radio-tagging walleye and subsequently tracking them.

- *Why don’t we track bass?* The limiting factor is generally money, as tags are expensive at more than \$200 each.
- *Is the movement of bass being addressed in this study?* The movement of tournament captured bass is of concern to biologists on some of the larger waterbodies (e.g. Great Lakes, Mississippi River) in the state where tournaments are conducted. At present the question is not being addressed, but that does not necessarily mean it can not be. The current study design focuses on bass mortality, economic impacts, and social impacts/attitudes.

There was continued discussion on the topic of fish movement, re-distribution of tournament-caught fish. Examples such as Lake Wisconsin and the Wisconsin River were presented as

examples of fish being released in locations other than where they were captured. In addition to biological concerns, there are perception problems as well, in that anglers feel they are fishing in a diminished fishery if tournament anglers are allowed to fish in a location, but fish captured there are released elsewhere.

It was expressed that tournaments need to be sensitive to public interests, regardless of whether those public interests are driven by perception or reality, because often times perception is reality.

That thought was countered by the statement that tournament anglers are the most concerned about fisheries issues.

b. Economic impacts data collection.

Schmalz provided an update on the economic impact data collected at the FLW tournament. He noted that FLW provided an incentive to anglers for filling out the expenditure survey. It was noted that data collection was a success, as approximately 200 surveys were completed by anglers regarding their expenditures associated with the event. This was compared to less than 10 for the Elite 50 event (although the number of anglers was much lower as well).

III. Fishing tournament rule development (2.5 hours)

A. Finalize tournament definition recommendation.

Schmalz reviewed a definition recommendation discussed by the FTAC previously. That definition was: "Fishing tournament" means any organized fishing activity, on any water of the state, where competition is the primary intent, where the waters to be fished are identified by name by the sponsor, where the tournament dates are specified, and where one of the following apply: 1. Prizes are awarded which, in total, have a value of more than \$500; *or* 2. The total number of participants is greater than 40 individuals or 20 boats.

There was some concern raised as to how a new, more inclusive definition would apply to fishing outings by clubs whose primary purpose is camaraderie? It was noted that this definition specifies that competition must be the primary intent for it to qualify.

Tournament discussion also generated interest in perhaps having different definitions based on the size of the waterbody where the event is held, with respect to the number of boats or anglers (e.g. <2,000 acres – 10 boats; >2,000 acres – 20 boats).

Subsequent discussion resulted in creating a definition that was inclusive of most everything that may be considered a tournament. Regulation of which events to permit could be considered in subsequent rule language (e.g. exemptions for certain types of events). As a result the following definition was recommended: "Fishing tournament" means any organized fishing activity, on any water of the state, where competition is the primary intent.

There was general agreement among meeting attendees with the proposed definition, although there was concern expressed about the term "competition", and that it should be clarified what is meant by "competition" in the definition.

B. Regulating the number, size, and frequency of tournaments.

None of agenda item III.B. was discussed. Instead, tournament definition discussions continued with discussion of what types of events should be exempted from a permit. The following suggestions were made:

- Kids/handicap fishing events
- Great Lakes trout and salmon derbies
- Long duration events (e.g. season long events)
- Events open to all waters of the state (not specified waters)
- Events where waters and dates are not specified
- Club outings
- Ice derbies
- Events where prizes awarded are less than \$500
- Events conducted as fund raisers (e.g. for non-profit organizations)
- Events with less than 10 boats or 20 people
- Events for charity

There was extensive discussion surrounding all of the suggestions, after which most all of the suggested exemptions were eliminated. Many cited that the department should be interested in knowing about (hence permitting) all events held regardless of any of the conditions that may exist in the above list. The department could choose to regulate them differently perhaps (e.g. reduced or no permit fee), but not provide an outright exemption.

Many agreed with the philosophy. Unfortunately, the time and staff requirements of most likely drastically increasing the number of tournament permits needs to be considered.

1. Incorporating number of boats * number of days.
2. Regulating by species.
3. Regulating by type of event (C&R vs. kill).

C. Other rule development discussion

NONE

IV. Next meeting (5 minutes).

No meeting was scheduled. It was felt that more work needed to be done in advance of the next meeting and that the date should be determined based on completion of that work. However, a meeting will need to be scheduled this fall to review the 2006 Bass Fishing Tournament Pilot Program applications.